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[British Roma] NEWS RELEASE - UK urged to find negotiated settlement to eviction stand-off with 86 Irish Traveller families – UN experts

Friday, 5 August, 2011 22:15

From: "Roma Virtual Network" <romale@zahav.net.il>
 To: Roma_Daily_News@yahooogroups.com

NEWS RELEASE

05 August 2011

UK urged to find negotiated settlement to eviction stand-off with 86 Irish Traveller families – UN experts

GENEVA – Two UN human rights experts* in the field of housing and minority issues called on the United Kingdom Government to find a peaceful and appropriate solution, and adequate alternative housing for 86 Irish Traveller families faced with forced eviction from Dale Farm, Essex, before the end of August.

"Evictions constitute a grave breach of human rights if not carried out with full respect for international standards," warned the Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, Raquel Rolnik. "We urge the UK authorities to halt the evictions process and to pursue negotiations with the residents until an acceptable agreement for relocation is reached in full conformity with international human rights obligations."

More than 300 people, a third of the Dale Farm Traveller community, including 110 children, are facing an imminent threat of forced eviction. "It is now of utmost importance that the rights of the residents to fair compensation for their lost homes and property and the provision of adequate alternative housing are fully respected," she stressed.

The newly appointed UN Independent Expert on minority issues, Rita Izsák, noted that "Eviction inevitably renders all affected families extremely vulnerable, including with regard to their access to essential services. This is doubly so for Travellers who may have traditionally rooted specific housing needs, and who face considerable discrimination and hostility in wider society."

"Special attention must also be given to the rights and particular needs of families with members with disabilities or suffering ill-health, or with small children, for example, considering that they lack anywhere else to go and eviction will sever established networks of support within their current community structures," said Ms. Izsák.

The Basildon District Council in Essex has been trying to evict these families since the late 1990s, based on the lack of planning permission for their housing structures. Although some of the Romani and Irish Traveller members of the Dale Farm community own the land, some families have been repeatedly denied planning permission for their caravans, due to the restrictive 'Green Belt' policy applied in the region.

"We are deeply concerned that, according to the eviction notices received by the 86 families, failure to vacate the respective plots by midnight 31 August 2011 will result in demolition of the residents' housing and property by Council authorities, effectively leaving them homeless", the UN Independent Expert said.

The financial cost of the forced evictions is estimated at 18 million pound sterling (around 30 million US dollars), including £10 million policing costs. "The irony of this case is that these costs do not appear to include the provision of adequate alternative accommodation for the evicted families, which are soon to be rendered homeless," noted the UN Special Rapporteur on housing.

The UN rights experts expressed their regret that the ongoing negotiations with the Dale Farm residents to identify alternative land for the evicted families were abandoned a year ago, casting aside a valuable opportunity to reach a just and lawful solution to this longstanding dispute.

(*) UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, Raquel Rolnik, and UN Independent Expert on minority issues, Rita Izsák.

ENDS

Raquel Rolnik was appointed as Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context by the UN Human Rights Council, in May 2008. As Special Rapporteur, she is independent from any government or organization and serves in her individual capacity. An architect and urban planner, Ms. Rolnik has extensive experience in the area of housing and urban policies. Learn more, log on to: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Housing/Pages/HousingIndex.aspx>

Rita Izsák was appointed as Independent Expert on minority issues by the Human Rights Council in June 2011. As Independent Expert, she is independent from any government or organization and serves in her individual capacity. Ms. Izsák has a decade of minority rights activism and has worked before in various capacities with NGOs, at the UN, OSCE and the Hungarian government, where she coordinated the creation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies. Learn more, log on to: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/minorities/expert/index.htm>

OHCHR Country Page – United Kingdom: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/countries/ENACARRegion/Pages/GBIndex.aspx>

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